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AUTHOR	Allen, Sheilah; Matheson, Joyce
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ABSTRACT

The 1975 report "Toward a Literate Society," commissioned by the United States Commissioner of Education, displays the following weaknesses among others: in making recommendations the editors ignore or contradict information contained in the individual papers; many issues relevant to literacy are omitted; and the report virtually ignores the majority of students in focusing on exceptional readers. Although there are some valuable papers, those on beginning reading and adult literacy provide no new information, and the book fails to meet the original goal of suggesting major strategies to implement changes on a national scale. In contrast "A Language for Life," or the Bullock Report, also published in 1975, is based on a systematic, detailed examination of the status of education in English schools. This report emphasizes language development activities for all age levels, and addresses most recommendations to individual teachers as the persons best able to effect change. Seventeen principal recommendations are made for improving literacy training in the nation's schools. The report has already had impact on reading teacher training programs in England. (GW)

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THE TWO FACES OF LITERACY

A Comparison of Two Recent Reports on Literacy:
Toward a Literate Society (ed. J. B. Carroll and J. S. Chall, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1975) and A Language for Life (Sir Alan Bullock, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1975).

by

Sheilah Allen
Assistant Professor of Reading
University of Lethbridge

and

Joyce Matheson
Doctoral Student in Reading Education
University of British Columbia

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Sheilah Allen
Joyce Matheson

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OVERVIEW

I. COMPARISON OF THE TWO REPORTS

- A. Impetus of the report
- B. Method of attack
- C. Main points
- D. Recommendations

II. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

- A. On reading in the language arts
- B. On standards of literacy
- C. On the importance of teachers
- D. On practical matters

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THE TWO FACES OF LITERACY

Sheilah Allen, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor of Reading
University of Lethbridge

Originally, Joyce Matheson entitled a paper related to this presentation "The British Are Coming" and "Oh Say Can You Read". This contrast may seem ambiguous now, but we hope that by comparing the Bullock Report and The Carroll-Chall Report, the point will become clear. Both reports were apparently intended to deal with the state of a nation's literacy, to recommend strategies for improving standards. Yet the focus and purposes of the two reports are obviously quite different. I will present my position on Toward a Literate Society, while Joyce will do A Language for Life. We plan to give such parallel information as: (1) the impetus of the report, (2) the method of attack, (3) the main points, and (4) the recommendations. However, our major concern is for implications of the reports for Canadian teachers and teacher educators.

Toward a Literate Society was commissioned by the now deceased James Allen, then U.S. Commissioner of Education. He was concerned about standards of literacy in America, and proposed that a task force suggest major strategies to implement changes on a national scale. Unfortunately due to fiscal and other problems, the book was years longer in writing and publication than had been intended. Moreover, it falls far short of Allen's original goal. The editors' objectives--to provide new knowledge of the reading process, impetus to research, and instructional strategies

for improved teaching of reading--are likewise not met.

Procedurally, the Carroll-Chall Report worked from comissioned papers supposedly summarized into editorial recommendations. In many instances, however, it is difficult to see how the recommendations relate to the papers, since these individual papers--containing both the best and the worst material in the book--seem often to have been ignored or even contradicted by the editors. Considering that literacy is supposedly the topic under discussion, many relevant issues are omitted. For instance, surely the major institution concerned with literacy is the school. Yet beginning reading and adult literacy receive considerable emphasis while classroom instruction is given scanty attention. And those papers dealing with classroom teaching reflect a distinctly limited point of view. Furthermore, by emphasizing exceptional readers (minority groups, disadvantaged, et cetera) the report virtually ignores the majority of students. Pragmatic and political, the report appears concerned with the achievement of minimal competence for the general populace.

Rather than discussing main points--it is doubtful that concensus could be reached on what they are--I should like to mention some valuable and some disappointing papers. John Bormuth's "Reading Literacy: Its Definition and Assessment" is worthwhile for its historical perspective on the literacy issue and its attempt to define terms clearly. Literacy is the ability to respond competently to real world reading tasks, determined by measuring an individual's skill, the kind and amount of skill, plus the readability of materials. Note the focus on the functional aspect of literacy, and the separation of reading literacy from literacy generally. Bormouth's directions for designing appropriate measuring

instruments are beneficial.

Two papers on "Sesame Street" and "The Electric Company" are interesting in their explanation of the application of research to the media. Those of you who question these shows (as, by the way, the British do) should consider the points in these papers before passing judgment. One article on "Motivational Aspects of the Literacy Problem" suggests the application of behavioral psychology to classroom instruction. Rather short shrift for the teacher anxiously awaiting practical and realistic advice on how to teach reading better.

The papers dealing with adult literacy are disappointing for both the researcher and the educator. There seems to be no knowledge base from which to attack the problem of adult illiteracy. Similarly, the papers on beginning reading merely repeat previous reports. There is no convincing argument to support the financial outlays requested, since past programs, at whatever level, indicate very limited success.

Recommendations beyond the call for increased federal funding, include a suggestion for more inservice teacher education and a request for the preparation of reading experts. The tone of the report is apathetic and pessimistic, but understandably so. Its contributors could easily see that reading was not considered a national priority in spite of attention in the media. Their own lack of a unified plan, emphasized by the disorganization of the report, provides little credence for the view that a national program such as Allen envisioned could become a reality. Fortunately, "The British Are Coming".

A LANGUAGE FOR LIFE

by Joyce Matheson

Impetus

A Language for Life is the report of the committee of inquiry appointed by the British Secretary of State for Education and Science under the chairmanship of Sir Alan Bullock. (It is commonly referred to as the "Bullock Reports".)

The terms of reference were:

a) to consider

1. all aspects of teaching the use of English, including reading, writing and speech;
2. how present practices can be improved (initial and in-service training);
3. how general levels of literary can be monitored; and

b) to make recommendations.

The report starts with the child's earliest language experiences, emphasizes the growth of language and reading abilities from kindergarten to secondary school and also looks at adult illiteracy which results when students leave school still unable to read.

Method of attack

While Americans sought out experts to bring the word to the unenlightened, the British opened the doors for input from all individuals and organizations concerned with literacy. As the report says "Several hundred individuals and organizations took advantage." Other individuals were interviewed, 100 schools, 21 Colleges of

Education and 6 Language or Reading Centres were visited in England. In addition, two committee members visited several schools and interviewed individuals in the United States.

The committee wanted to know exactly how things really were in the school so two questionnaires were sent out to 1,415 primary and 392 secondary schools. The survey looked at school organization, staffing and resources as they related to the teaching of reading and English. The survey also looked in detail at the weekly range of activities a child would experience in school. Extremely detailed reports were collected on a random sample of students aged 6, 9, 12 and 14. Records of individual and class time spent on English or language arts were kept for 4,661 students.

This survey, copies of the actual questionnaires, a full range of tables, diagrams and discussion of sampling methods and statistical analyses take up one quarter of the report (Section 9). The survey and the information it provided gives a solid base of knowledge of what is actually going on in the schools, a solid base on which to build recommendations.

The report is carefully indexed to facilitate moving back and forth between related items in different sections and includes an excellent glossary which clarifies the educational jargon and British acronyms.

Main Points

The Bullock Report recognizes the complexity of the literacy problem and notes that the solution does not lie in "a few neat administrative strokes." The report declares "there is nothing to equal in importance the quality and achievement of the individual teacher."

The report is vitally concerned with the child's language development. It even suggests that language development be included in prenatal classes for parents as an item equal in importance to physical and emotional development. This concern for language is emphasized for all age levels--including elementary and secondary school students. The report also endorses the discovery process as the surest means for a child to develop mastery of his language. (In a note of dissent, Dr. Stuart Froome expresses his own disagreement with this position.)

The overall feeling of the report is one of intensely human sensitivity. Every recommendation is directed to the lowest possible level of administration. Most are addressed to the individual teacher in the classroom. The L.E.A. (Local Education Authority) is seen as the logical unit for providing support personnel and special programs for students with problems. This belief in the ability of classroom teachers to bring about change must engender more positive support from the teachers than could possibly be developed by the creation of a bureaucratic superstructure of experts who would lay on new programs and methods.

Recommendations

There are 17 principal recommendations based on 333 conclusions and recommendations. Each of these is referenced back to the sections and pages of the report that support them. These recommendations include:

1. the development of a system to assess, monitor and establish criteria for literacy.
2. emphasis on language ability development, reading competency at all ages and language policy across the curriculum.

3. establishment of qualified support personnel, better staffing and inter-school record keeping and consultation.

4. improvement in staffing, accommodation, books and other supplies and ancilliary help in the secondary schools.

5. early diagnosis and concentrated treatment for students with reading problems plus continued support when they return to the regular classroom.

6. substantial and sustained tuition for adult illiterates and for children of families of overseas origin.

7. provision of a substantial course on language (including reading) for every teacher's initial training and expansion of inservice programs--including diploma and graduate school courses.

8. development of a national centre for language in education concerned with the teaching of language and reading at all levels.

Impact

A Language for Life was published in 1975. In March 1977, Reading Education--UK, a Journal of the United Kingdom Reading Association produced a special edition entitled "Bullock--Two Years On." In spite of the confusion and dissonance of a period of rapid change in teacher education, the issue "contains some encouraging evidence that teacher training in the field of reading has changed for the better in the period since the publication of the Bullock Report." Some of this evidence relates to attempts by specific colleges to implement the report at initial, inservice and community levels; the development of an Advisors' Bullock Committee at the local level; and report on the state of reading teacher training across the whole country.

In another journal, Reading, a letter by the president of the U.K.R.A. refers to their upcoming 1977 conference as the 'Bullock' Conference. She also notes that her own work is dominated by the Bullock Report and she finishes a new book, plans a new In-service Diploma

Course and plans the Reading Conference.

Obviously the Bullock Report is being read and its recommendations are being implemented.